

Epiphany 5-February 5, 2023

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Matthew 5:13-20

"Let Your Light Shine" Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good.

Many years later, Jesus walked down in the Jordan River to be baptized by John the Baptist and again there was darkness on the earth. The darkness of sin. When Jesus was baptized, the heavens were opened, and the spirit of God descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove. God spoke on this day too and said, "You are my beloved child with whom I am well pleased." After Jesus received this promise from God, Jesus opened his mouth and said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

Each of you must have this the light of life since you have followed Jesus into this place today and Jesus now says to you, "**You** are the light of the world." I believe that in the beginning, the Lord created light with his word. I also believe that Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness. But for you and I to be called the light of the world seems to be stretching the idea of shining lights a little too far. But Jesus is not offering you to a light as an option or for your consideration. When Jesus says, "Let your light shine.", he is not hoping that you have some spark within yourself that with the right amount of encouragement you will turn into a glowing flame to break through the darkness of this world. No, you each have been given light from God who created you and Jesus who has saved you and it is with their light in you that you will shine.

The first time that Kim and I went to Arizona, we were warned that the part of town where we were staying was called a "dark town". From this description, I feared and imagined that we would be staying in a shady part of the town where drug deals often would go down at night and all sorts of evil would come out at night and it would be hard to rest until the morning light. But we were informed that it really was a safe part of the city. So safe that only the retired snowbirds lived in these houses and went to bed early and did not want to be disturbed by any streetlights. The first time we stayed there it was after 1:00 in the morning before we arrived at this house. We had no idea where we were going as we trusted our GPS to take us to this house that was surrounded by darkness. We had to use the flashlights on our phones to make sure we were entering the right house. I was not convinced of the safety of this area based on what people said. I would have slept better with some light. It doesn't take a bright light to break the darkness and we went to sleep looking forward to seeing the light of day.

We might consider our lights small and wonder what difference could our flickering flames make in the world? But Jesus did not call us flickering flames. We are not smoldering flax as Jesus speaks of later in Matthew that causes more darkness. We are the light of the world, and we are the salt of the earth because Jesus has said so and when Jesus commands us to do something, you better be ready for results. Jesus has created you and has created you to be a light that will shine into darkness.

Satan is the darkness that our light will break into. Satan has the bushel basket in his hand and wants you to believe that this light of mine that you sang about isn't strong enough to accomplish anything and is ready to snuff your light out. But you are not followers of Satan and darkness. You are called to be light. You, like Jesus have received the Holy Spirit in your baptisms and you likely were told as I have told every person that I have

baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit with these words of Jesus we just heard today **“Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to your father in heaven.”** I must admit that I didn’t like saying these words at first. I wondered why I would give a promise to a baby that they are children of God and before their forehead was dry from the baptismal water would deliver God’s command to let their light shine. I honestly searched the scriptures to find something better to say to a baby who was just baptized. But I realized that Satan had tried to snuff out what Jesus said by not clearly hearing his words. Jesus does not place a mirror in front of us so that we can see our own good works. Jesus tells us to let our light shine so that OTHERS can see our good works and give God the glory who gave us his light. And the light we shine is not our own. We have received this light from the God who created this light.

Kendra Kappler joined me as we provided a worship service at the DNRC this past Tuesday afternoon. We used this scripture about “Letting your light shine.” for the basis of our worship time. Very few of the residents are able to get to worship without the help from someone else. They understand very well what it is like to depend on someone else for what they want to do. Many of these residents are more dependent on the help of others than newborn babies are. But I asked these residents, “Who is Jesus talking to when he said, “Let your light shine.” They responded that Jesus is speaking to everyone. But I think these residents have a better understanding of what it means to not have the power to shine, but what it means to be given the power to let their light shine. I reminded them that one way that I have seen their light shine is how I know that I can depend on them to pray for the people that are on our prayer lists when they receive their bulletins in the mail. They don’t ask details of why these people have requested our prayers, they simply let their light shine. There is a resident who I have also gotten to know, and I have watched her memory decline from knowing who I am to not knowing anyone anymore. But I see the light shining in this lady. When I see her, she smiles, and she has nothing bad to say about anyone. Her light still shines when she smiles.

We have been receiving kind words from residents and workers at Orchard Hills the past couple weeks after Kim’s dad passed away. We didn’t always see the light that others saw shining from her dad. His gift of conversation was appreciated by others even though the things he might have said might not have made sense to us. He was able to let his light shine without his efforts.

This is what Jesus meant by “Let your light shine.” Just get yourself out of the way and let the light that was put in you the day that you were baptized shine for others to see while giving the glory to God.

There is a need for light in this world. Sometimes the littlest of lights is just what is needed to break through someone’s darkest day. You do not have to fear if you are shining in the right way. God’s light cannot be hidden and there is plenty of darkness in this world to shine into. Jesus has not abolished the law or the work that he has called you to do. But Jesus has called you by name and now sends you out to be salt of the earth. Jesus has spoken to you and says, “Let your light shine.” Amen